



restoreing dc

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PLANNING FOR THE HOLIDAYS: GETTING READY FOR A PARTY

by Tom Litke

This may be your first reminder, but it certainly won't be your last: the Holidays are coming. Are you prepared? Being prepared means having a plan for the holidays and all the special events that make the cash register ring even more during the holiday sales period!

Getting Ready as a Merchant

Many merchants think it takes piles of cash and a team of decorators to prepare their space for the holidays and make the difference in sales. Not so! Stay open later, no matter what you do — everyone's working and shopping hours get pushed around — folks will do laundry at midnight if they can shop late. Also, more than a quarter of all retail sales happen in December — give people every opportunity to spend in their highest-spending period.

Remember, you're planning a party — let your customers know what time to arrive and what gifts to expect! When you send holiday cards to your clients informing them of your seasonal events, include a coupon for free gift-wrapping and let them know about your extended hours.

For all those who didn't get an invitation (your holiday card reminder), decorate your window for the season to let passers-by know they're on the guest list! And have them sign in (so we can invite the good shoppers back next year...)

Hire an extra person — not just for the cash register but to assist customers. If customers cannot find what they are seeking, they won't even get to the cash register. If this is not feasible for your business, have plenty of holiday-related items to read, to pick up, to look at (and hopefully to buy) as your customers are waiting in line. Just ask your grocer how effective such "impulse items" are.



Getting Ready as a Commercial District

Coordinating a block party is what we're talking about here, and we all know this takes time and energy from busy businesses, making it a perfect project for Main Streets programs and volunteers! Make sure to pool resources on the easiest tasks first — for example, combine mailing lists and mail out postcards with a neighborhood theme and the specials at participating businesses. This cross-promotion strategy saves time and lowers the printing costs while highlighting the entire neighborhood.

For decorating tasks, make sure to organize with the shops next door when you string lights, post banners, wrap corn stalks and make window displays — a "cluster" strategy is more visually impressive than individual installations.

Dupont Circle is preparing for their Holiday Decorating Contest. Shops along P Street, Connecticut Avenue and 17th Street will compete for awards in best holiday spirit, and there is already friendly competition between the areas. Merchants prepare their stores individually, but the business district will feel like a tighter community as merchants discuss their decorations and shoppers vote for their favorites!

Commercial districts can also coordinate late night sales in the weeks before Christmas. It's not so difficult to set up thematic evenings, such as a "Men's Night Out," giving men the opportunity to shop like men shop. In this case, take away the discomfort for those who don't like to shop: offer gift-wrapping, offer a woman's opinion, explain how women's clothing is sized, change the

atmosphere of your boutique for just one night! This was so successful in one neighborhood that they added a second Men's Night Out!

Tom Litke works for reSTORE DC/DC Main Streets as an advisor to the DC Main Street programs. Prior to his work in DC, he directed a nationally-recognized Boston Main Street.

TEN CHEAP WAYS TO PREPARE FOR THE SEASON

Some things you can do to make your corridor look its best this holiday season

- 1 Help merchants remove outdated promotional materials ("Summer Clearance" is over!)
- 2 Pick up litter, sweep leaves, remove broken branches
- 3 Replace old light bulbs in light fixtures on buildings and signs. Call DDOT at 727-1000 to fix streetlights.
- 4 Install temporary, cost-effective gateway decorations
- 5 Use the holiday season as an excuse to improve window displays
- 6 Post corn stalks (but don't block street signs!)
- 7 Coordinate at least ten stores to keep extended hours
- 8 Write a press release letting residents know of extended hours and specials
- 9 Have candy or refreshments ready to make shopping easier for parents shopping with children
- 10 Get one merchant to coordinate and host a Mixer for residents and/or merchants

UPCOMING EVENTS

Main Street Anacostia

- ① www.mainstreetanacostia.org
- Holiday Banners: Nov. 21–Jan. 5
- Holiday Window Decorating Contest: Nov. 25–Jan. 2
- Holiday Tour of Historic Homes: Dec. 18

Barracks Row Main Street

- ① <http://www.barracksrow.org>
- Santa's Workshop: Dec. 1

Shaw Main Streets

- ① www.shawmainstreets.com
- Holiday Business Mixer: Dec. 6

MidCity Business Association

- ① www.midcitylife.com
- MidCity, Bright Lights: Nov. 26–Jan. 3

Training for Main Streets

- ① restoredc.dc.gov
- DC Main Streets Executive Director Training: Nov. 17
- DC Main Streets Board Capacity Building for Sustainable Main Street Operations: Dec. 3

Training for Small Businesses

- ① restoredc.dc.gov/ebic
- LSDBE Application Office Hours: Nov. 3
- How to Write a Business Plan: Nov. 3
- Non-Profit Strategic Planning: Nov. 9
- Building Client Relationships: Nov. 10
- Limited Liability Companies: Nov. 16
- Understanding and Building Business Credit: Nov. 22
- How to Get a 7(a) Loan: Nov. 28
- Starting a Home-Based Business: Nov. 29
- SBA 504 Loan for Buying Commercial Property: Nov. 29
- Enterprise Zone Tax Credits: Nov. 30

IN THE TRENCHES | GETTING TO KNOW OUR MAIN STREET BUSINESSES

Ellington's on 8th hosts over 250 events a year at their location near Eastern Market/on 8th Street SE on Barracks Row Main Street. Owner Annette Martin and her sister have six holiday parties coming up this winter and we interviewed Annette to find out more about what these master party-throwers are doing.

RDC: CAN YOU GIVE US A LITTLE BACKGROUND ON YOUR RESTAURANT?

My sister and I opened Ellington's seven years ago. Maybe it's because Ellington's is run by two sisters, but the employees and the customers are like a family. Many people have been coming here since we opened and there's a lot of hand-slapping and hugging.

RDC: HOW DOES THIS FAMILY ATMOSPHERE TRANSLATE TO YOUR EVENTS?

Most of our holiday events were created at the request of our customers. They are for people who are not able to be with their families for the holidays or for people who want to celebrate twice, once at home and once with their family at Ellington's.

This holiday season will start out with our Pre-Thanksgiving Jazz Brunch on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. We bring out the turkey and the ham and the fixins and we have musicians here. It's a real festive kind of thing.

We will be hosting our first toy drive this year. We plan on teaming up with some of the local businesses to make it a huge success. That will start on November 29.

On December 14 we have our customer appreciation holiday party where we have entertainment and free food for those who have been with us over the past seven years. We offer things that people might miss from their childhood: Eggnog, holiday caroling, and cookie painting.

Then we host a pre-holiday Jazz Brunch on Sunday, December 18.

Our New Year's Eve party is a *prix fixe* dinner. Customers are mostly from the neighborhood. Some people dress up in formal attire and some people wear jeans. Everyone is welcome. We have New Year's champagne and people dance and leave happy.

Also, we have found that a lot of restaurants are closed on New Year's Day. Last year was our first year open on New Year's Day and we had a full house, which took us by surprise . . . we only had one cook! This year, we will be prepared . . . we will be open at 10 AM for breakfast.

Don't forget the fall
DC Sales Tax Holiday:

November 25 (Fri) - Dec 4 (Sun).

Visit restoredc.dc.gov for details.



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